

The Institute for the Study of Non-Violence (/The+Institute+for+the+Study+of+Non-Violence)

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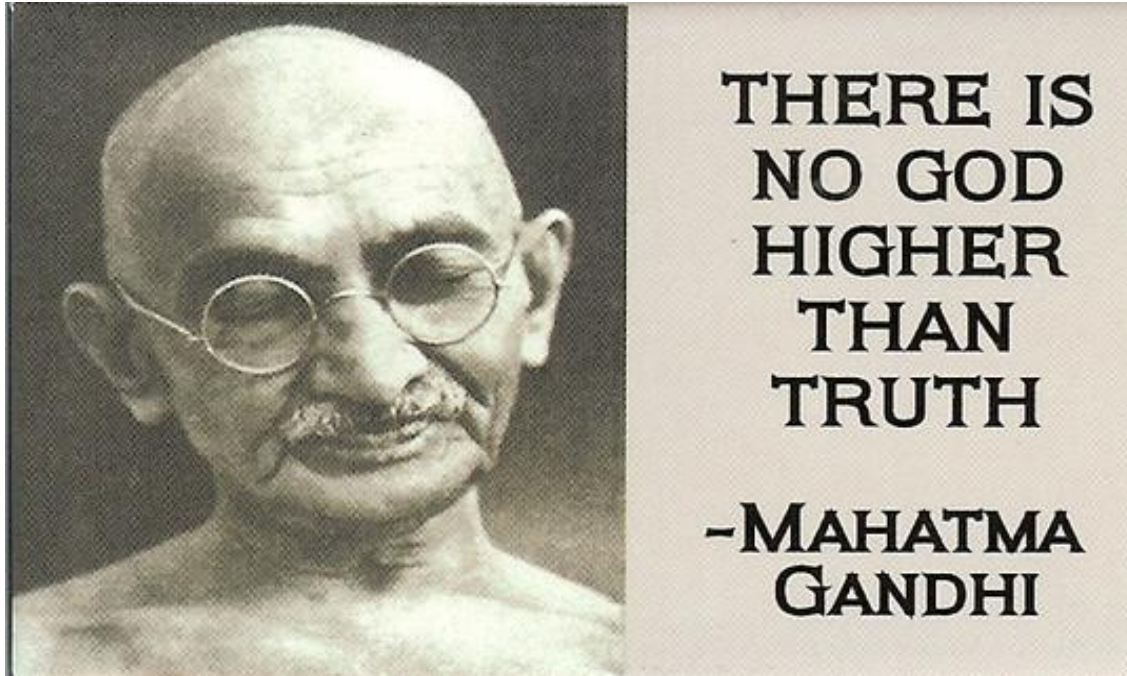
A signed card from the Institute; probably late sixties; looks like Christopher Colorado Jones artwork

The Institute for the Study of Non-Violence

by Court Tefft

Complete non-violence is a complete absence of ill will against all that lives.

Gandhi

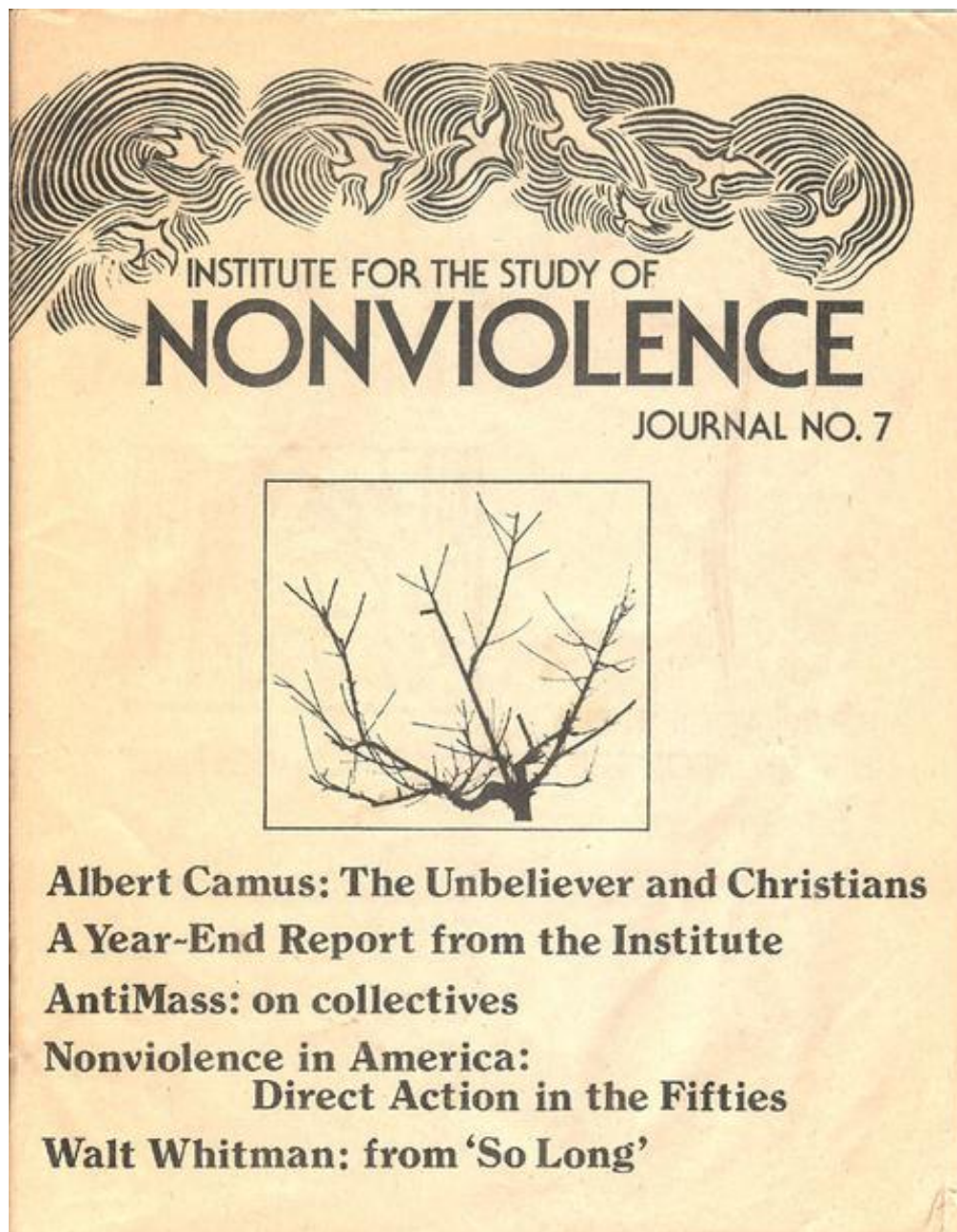


WHAT IS TRUTH?

Beyond limited truths there is one absolute Truth which is total and all-embracing. But it is indescribable, because it is God. Or say, rather, God is Truth...Other things, therefore can be true only in a relative sense.

He...who understands truth, follows nothing but truth in thought, speech and action, comes to know God and gains the seer's vision of the past, the present and the future. He attains *moksha* (liberation) though still encased in the physical frame.

*There will be no Peace until there is Justice,
No Justice until there is Understanding,
No Understanding until there is Honesty,
No Honesty until there is Humility,
No humility until there is Wisdom,
No Wisdom until there is Love,*

The Institute for the Study of Non-Violence

I am convinced that love is the most durable power in the world. It is not an expression of impractical idealism, but of practical realism. Far from being the pious injunction of a Utopian dreamer, love is an absolute necessity for the survival of our civilization. To return hate for hate does nothing but intensify the existence of evil in the universe. Someone must have sense enough and religion enough to cut off the chain of hate and evil and this can only be done through love,
MLK 1957

In 1965 [Joan Baez](#) was on top of the world. She was known not only for her musical talent and association with Bob Dylan but for her political activism and association with Martin Luther King Jr. Motivated by a desire to improve herself and the world around her, Joan and her friend [Ira Sandperl](#) came up with the idea of forming a school called The Institute for the Study of Nonviolence.



[Ira Sandperl](#) has been Joan's friend, spiritual and political mentor since her days at Palo Alto High School. They met through the American Friends Service Committee, the social action branch of the Quaker Faith. The Quakers, long known for their political pacifist activities, Richard Nixon being the exception to the rule, have always had a strong progressive educational presence in Palo Alto.

Ira and Joan asked two friends Holly Chonery and Roy Kepler for help. Roy Kepler the founder of Keplers bookstore in Menlo Park, where members of the Grateful Dead spent hours honing their craft, was a well known pacifist and WWII draft resister. Kepler also helped establish KPFA and the Pacifica radio network, the first and last publicly funded independent radio network.

According to Joan "The school was to be run in seminar style, unpressured and unhurried, and would cost a minimal amount to attend. We would use a reading list, and the various seminars would consist of discussions on the reading. We would subscribe to the journals and newspapers which could keep us best informed about world affairs, and also to various nonviolent action journals and bulletins. And we would have organized meditation."

Before getting permission from Donald Eldridge to use the front Lands and Long Hall on what would later be called "[The Land](#)", as a learning center which in turn and time opened up the backlands to the more free spirited anarchistic homesteading hippies community builders of the backlands, the Institute had been located in Carmel Valley, and later in Palo Alto and at the bottom of Moody Canyon - just below the hairpin on Moody Road in Los Altos Hills.

The original Institute had been established by [Ira Sandperl](#) and Joan Baez in Carmel only after a strong and loosely organized conservative opposition fearful of "communist hippie weirdo's" invading "their" valley and threatening "their" way of life, tried to kill it. Fortunately, despite the opposition, the county board of Supervisors didn't see it that way and granted the Institute the necessary permit.

The Times they are a-Changing:

There are always two parties, the party of the past and the party of the Future: the Establishment and the Movement. At times the resistance is reanimated, the schism runs under the world and appears in Literature, Philosophy, Church, State and social custom.

Ralph Waldo Emerson

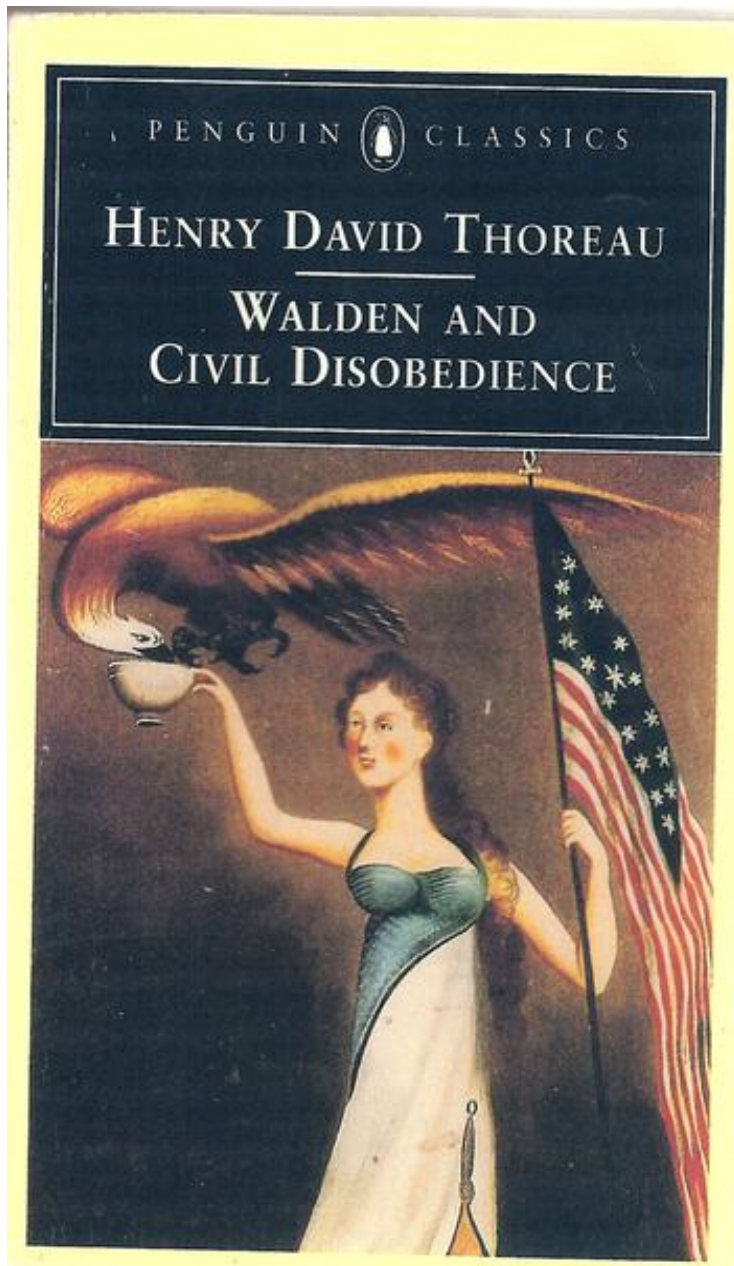
There is no way to peace, peace is the way.

AJ Muste

By the mid 1960's the schism over the Vietnam War was beginning to widen and breathe life into another non-violent and soon to be very powerful movement in opposition to the war. The music, literature youth oriented culture and even the advertisements of the time were beginning to reflect a change in attitude. Blind trust, acceptance and lock stop obedience to social mores and political regimes became far more of an impediment to change than the tool for change they had once been.



[Ira Sandperl](#) long known as an advocate of radical non-violent action and as an expert on Mahatma Gandhi was deeply influenced by Thoreau, Emerson and the Transcendentalist movement of the 1860's. Thoreau's strong abolitionists stance and vocal opposition to the slave state laws of the day which led to his imprisonment for withholding taxes, also penned *Walden* and *Civil Disobedience*. The book would have a profound impact on political activists, and environmentalist for centuries to come.



Gandhi was influenced by Thoreau but felt he “was not perhaps an out-and-out champion of non-violence.” Gandhi’s application of non-violence in mass was a first. Thoreau did not lead massive work slowdowns, demonstrations or boycotts as in the cases of Gandhi or Martin Luther King, who was greatly influenced by Gandhi. Gandhi’s doctrine of civility stated that “civility and humility are expressions of the spirit of non-violence. A non-co-operator, therefore, ought never to be uncivil.” Another major influence on Gandhi and [Ira Sandperl](#) was the writer and Christian anarchist Leo Tolstoy. Tolstoy’s book *The Kingdom of God is Within You* had a lot in common with the Transcendentalist Movement. The Transcendentalists and Tolstoy believed that the living God resided in the soul, which was an affront to the established hierarchical spiritual organizations of the early 1800’s. The Gnostics, an early branch of the Christian tree, had also believed that God was within. The Gnostics were ultimately exterminated and forced underground by reactionary fundamentalists who ceased control of the church and purged it of many early scriptures that empowered the individual as opposed to the church hierarchy.

It’s also important to note that the Transcendentalists established a commune in 1841 outside of Boston

that set off a wave of communal experiments. Brook Farm was an attempt to get away from what the Transcendentalist movement viewed as the drudgery of Western Civilization with its over emphases on making money and the tyranny of the time clock imposed on workers by the industrial capitalists of the day. Joan Baez and her husband David Harris would also be instrumental in the establishment of the commune I live on today (Struggle Mt.) as well as an 800 acre commune up the road (The Land), where Joan and Ira first got permission to use the property for seminars and classes.

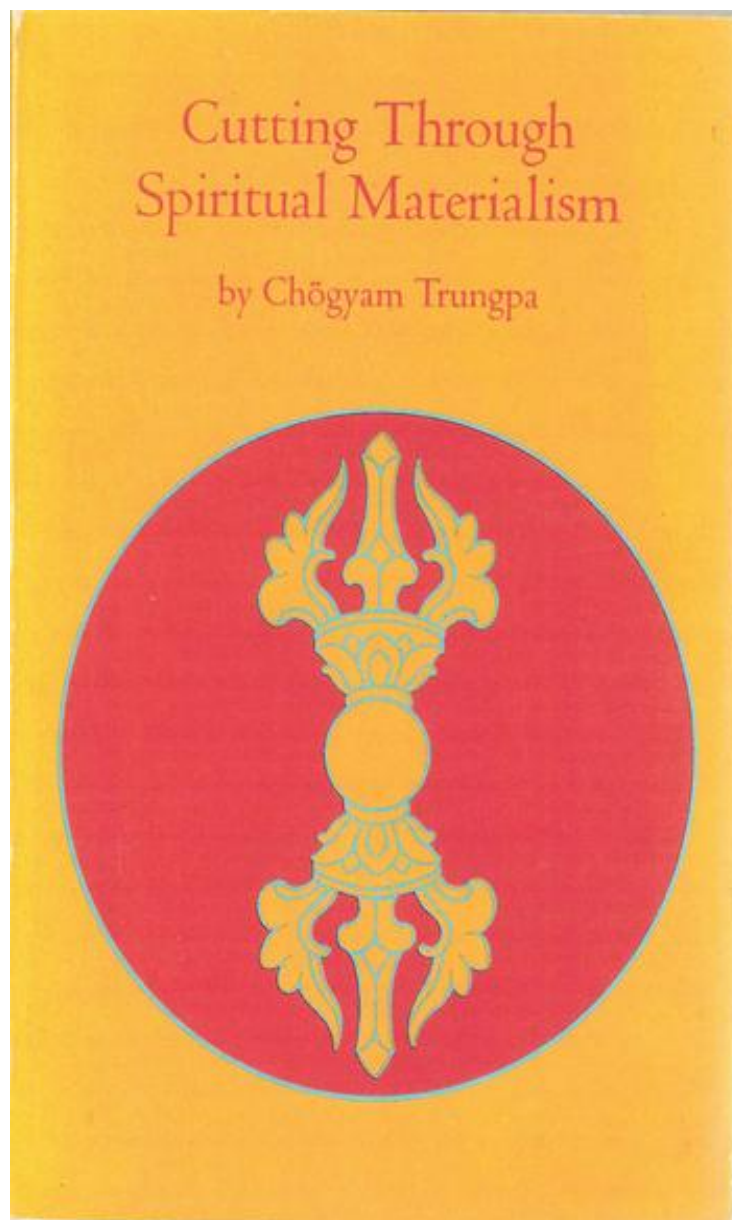
L. Mandel a former Land and Black Mt. resident once told me of a visit by Chogyam Trungpa to The Land, where he was to give a lecture to the war resisters on non-violence. Trungpa was a well known Tibetan Buddhist monk who had narrowly escaped with his life when the Chinese Communists invaded Tibet in 1959. Rimpoche Trungpa was not your average Tibetan monk. He openly had affairs with some of his female students and had gotten married before fleeing Tibet. He also ate meat and loved to throw wild parties. Here is what L. Mandel wrote about his visit at The land:

"About Trungpa all I remember (and remember he and Kobun were the first Eastern spiritual teachers I had ever seen) was he was wearing a loud Hawaiian shirt and smoking a cigarette, he also limped. He joked how people expected a Tibetan lama to look and act a certain way and his appearance was surprising to some."

"I do remember quite clearly a moment where one of the Nonviolent Resistance people asked the question "What do you think we can do to stop the violence in the world?" and Trungpa answered "How can you change the violence in the world if you haven't dealt with the violence within yourself?" That impressed me at the time since it was the first time I ever heard that idea, though later it became quite a commonplace."

Like Gandhi before him had once observed : "the job of India was to free the Indians from being in front of the British guns and free the British from being behind them", or in Trungpas own words "true spirituality is not a battle, it is the ultimate practice of nonviolence."

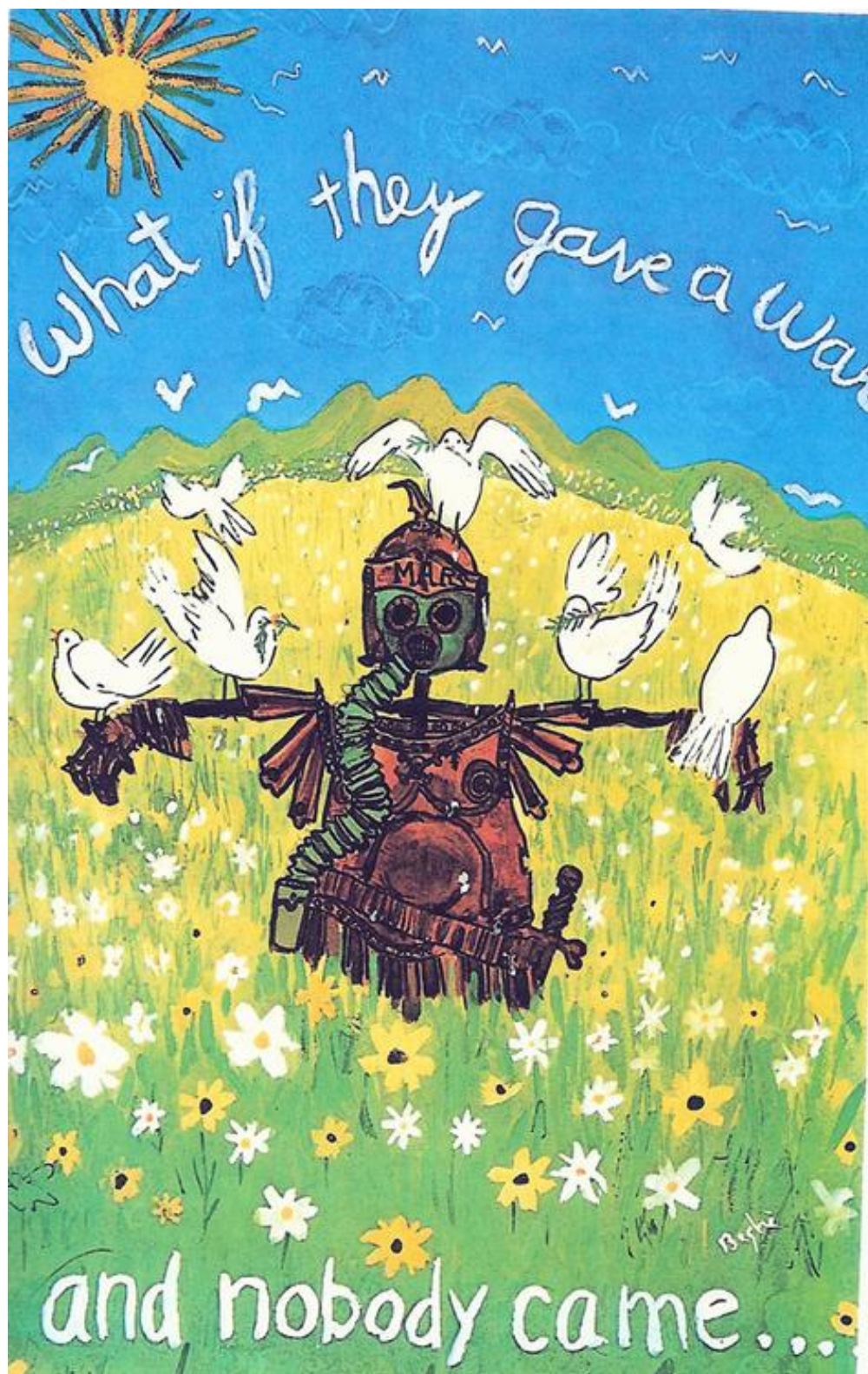
His American disciples had established a communal center in Barnet, Vermont and another in Northern Colorado while Trungpa settled in Boulder Colorado. Not as well known as Yogananda, Meher Baba, or Mahareshi, he definitely made his mark on the soul searching baby boomers with his must read Cutting Through Spiritual Materialism (1973) and later The Myth of Freedom and the Way of Meditation.



According to Joan Baez The Institute “studied the concept theory, history and application of non-violence in all its aspects, from use in personal relationships to internationally organized methods of fighting oppression.” The institute did more than study it took nonviolent action serving “as a base for study groups, organizing projects, public speaking, counseling, research, and writing, printing and distributing literature and other educational work.”

“The Institute maintained a free community library in a Red house on Lytton Street in Palo Alto focusing on non-violence and the means of change”, it also printed a journal.

The Institute was a non-profit corporation that believed “that non-violence cannot be built in isolation but rather that a truly non-violent society ultimately depends on actively committed people.”



By 1976 the internal struggles at the Institute had become very intense. One Institute associate explained to me that meetings, despite all the non-violent rhetoric, could become very heated. There were a lot of distractions based on sexual attractions and personally competitive over reactions to some situations. The Institute, they explained, was composed of some very attractive people with dynamic personalities engaged in political action at the dawn of a sexual libertine revolutionary cycle. While Joan

was devoting most of her time to the Institute, others were devoting their time to Joan, competing for inner-circle status or engaged in protecting her from outsiders.



Group Dynamics are always complicated.

Michael Doyle in his book *Radical Chapters* (2012) recounts that: "A distinctly feminist-orientated coalition, known as 'The Collective', came to the fore... Some members were denouncing the Institute's organizational structure as a typical male patriarchy, an adversary to be overcome." An us-versus-them mentality set in.

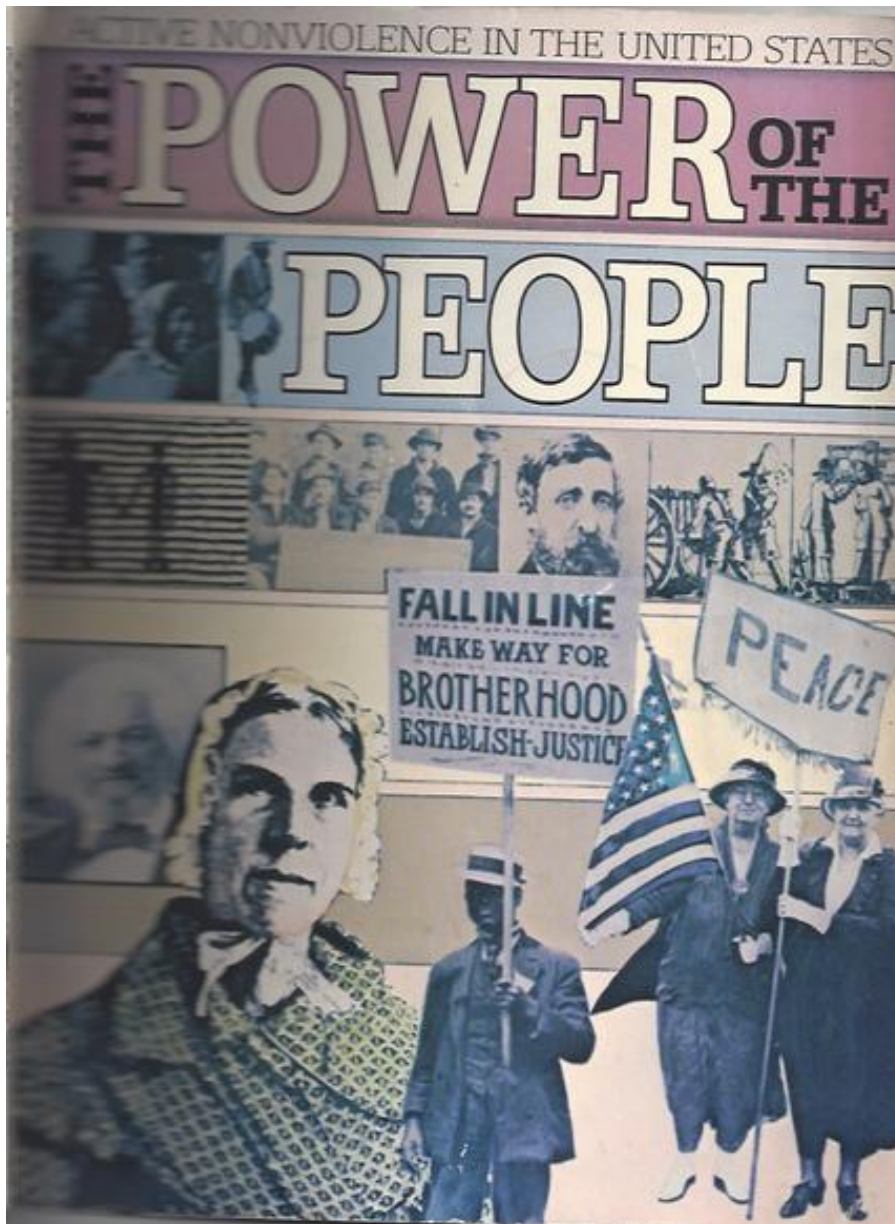
"Finally, in 1976, the internal struggles grew too much. Ira, Roy and Joan agreed to resign as Institute board members, giving over to 'The Collective,' the remaining assets --- including use of the building at 667 Lytton Street. In return they wanted to end use of the Institute's name." Joan and Ira stressed they would not "publicly demean or criticize the work of the projects still based at 667 Lytton Street in Palo Alto."

In time the Institute evolved and morphed into the Resource Center for Nonviolence located at 612 Ocean Street in Santa Cruz. The non-profit center operates on donations and is a valuable asset to the local community, providing a space for other organizations to host events. Since 1976 the Resource Center has sponsored numerous events of its own hosted by activists like Cesar Chavez, Daniel Ellsberg, Naomi Klein and others. Today, the Resource Center for Nonviolence is committed to developing the next generation of activists and empowering youth with skills in nonviolence." "We also study and seek out the insights of many other sources including the feminist, anarchist, environmental, and other social change movements, anti-nuclear and human rights campaigns," occurring around the globe.

"The Center consciously tries to learn from the bold, courageous, and imaginative actions of those who have gone before us and those who face different challenges in other parts of the world. We think and learn from the work and insights of Mohandas Gandhi, Martin Luther King Jr., Dorothy Day, Cesar Chavez and Barbara Deming."

In 1977 former Struggle Mountain resident and Institute member Robert Cooney in conjunction with

Helen Michalowski edited and produced an important history on the American tradition of nonviolence. The cooperative publishing effort was sponsored by groups including the Institute, American Friends Service Committee(s), War Resisters league(s) and a host of other non-violent activist groups. The power of The People is visually stimulating and historically comprehensive.



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